

CORRESPONDENCE

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The Next Million Years

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—An address on mankind's future by Sir Charles Darwin at Delhi University, reported in the *Statesman Overseas Weekly* of March 6th, 1954, calls for some criticism, as the views expressed might discourage efforts to prevent world overpopulation.

Demographers, contrary to the wishful thinking of planners and agricultural experts, will agree with him that scientific development of food production can never cope with the modern greatly increased rate of world population, and that the world is again faced with hunger. But his prediction that the world will become so crowded that its people will not have room to lie down is not credible. Population can never increase and survive beyond the amount of food available at any given time. Food production increases only slowly. So recurrent famines, wars and diseases will, as hitherto, cut off any excess population.

His pessimistic view that mankind will never curtail their progeny is not supported by recent history. No doubt the backward peoples and classes are continuing their unrestricted reproduction. But in some Western countries, e.g. Britain and Scandinavia, birth control, owing to realization of its necessity and advantages, has become a general practice except among the poorer classes. It needs only widespread social education, as Sir John Megaw, former Director-General, Indian Medical Services, pointed out, for the less advanced peoples and classes to adopt the practice, and, if the governments and educated classes of these countries will be wise enough to promote the movement actively, a balance of world population and resources can in time be established. Indeed, overpopulated countries would benefit by reduction of population, just as Ireland, which had in 1847 a starving population of eight million, is now far better off with its present population of four million.

I would add that the slow progress of birth control in backward countries appears largely due to defective tactics. One is the general omission to secure the active co-operation of the male population. The success of reducing births and poverty, and in thereby promoting the health of the labourers and their families in a Hawaiian plantation, described in the *Journal of Contraception* (October 1938), was due mainly to the men and their use of good but cheap condoms, costing 10 cents for three. Apparently no supplementary chemical was used. (The use of a reliable, washable condom would make the cost of contraception for the poor very small.) The importance of this Hawaiian experiment does not seem realized. Secondly, clinics in rural areas can only be few and far between, and

women cannot spare the time and trouble to go to them. So the information and appliances must be supplied at the homes. This was realized by Mr. A. B. Kaufman, of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. He gave up the clinic method, finding the home visitation one far cheaper and more effective. His nurses work over Canada, and two thousand doctors co-operate with his Bureau. Supplies are mailed to the applicants and cost less than one-third of retail prices. Thirdly, commercial enterprise in supplying contraceptives, with their quality and perhaps prices supervised by some central agency, should be encouraged widely; thereby family limitation and spacing, and prevention of illegitimate births and of venereal diseases will be facilitated. Lastly, supporters of the movement need to be organized in every town and village to spread its principles and practice.

London, W.

JAMES P. BRANDER.

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—The first part of Mr. Brander's letter illustrates a rule which no lecturer should ever forget, and this is that he must never say anything at all unexpected, because it will inevitably be reported without its context and so will be misunderstood. I am afraid I forgot this rule, and so I had better explain what happened. In the course of my lecture I referred to the fact that we are now living in an entirely abnormal period of history, and that one of its principal abnormalities is that the population of the world is doubling itself in a century. We are used to this condition, since neither we nor our fathers nor our grandfathers before them have ever seen anything different, but it is demonstrably quite abnormal. Let anyone who doubts this imagine that it is normal, so that century after century population should double itself, and let him follow out the consequence. As a mere matter of arithmetic the absurd result comes out that there would be just standing room on the land surfaces of the earth after only two thousand years. So mere arithmetic shows what a very abnormal time we are living in.

As to the rest of his letter I will not attempt to answer it in detail, because to do so would merely be to repeat reasoning which I have given at some length elsewhere. I agree with him that it would be very pleasant if things should happen as he seems to expect, so that populations should stop increasing at the present menacing rate, and my difference from him is that I see little reason to hope that this is what will happen in the long run. Even if, as seems possible, things should go that way for the next few decades, there is no prospect of it for most of the vast periods of future human history. The mere fact that a policy is reasonable is unfortunately not enough to make everybody conform to it. Thus